



Workers' Compensation Commission

A new chairman, two new commissioners at the agency

Commissioner Andrea C. Roche took over as chairman of the South Carolina Workers' Compensation Commission on June 30, 2008, the same day commissioners Avery B. Wilkerson and Thomas Scott Beck joined the agency.

Former chairman David W. Huffstetler continues to serve as commissioner, along with commissioners Susan S. Barden, G. Bryan Lyndon, and Derrick L. Williams. Commissioner Williams was reappointed to a six-year term beginning June 30, 2008.

"My first priority is to make sure things continue to run as smoothly as they have been running the last few years," says chairman Roche. "We have substantially reduced hearing times, and we are tracking information so much better now thanks to our new computer system. I think we all dream of the day we can go paperless," she says.

Chairman Roche says she will do what she can to streamline the dockets and move cases more quickly towards a resolution. "Our workers' compensation system continues to improve and, in particular, we have high hopes that employers will see a favorable impact from the new hospital payment system. We also expect it won't be long before we start seeing results from the reform legislation passed in 2007," she says.

The publicity leading up to last year's reform legislation is what drew Commissioner Thomas Scott Beck to the agency. "I read about it in the newspapers and decided to submit my name to the governor. I didn't expect anything would come of it but I figured it couldn't hurt," he says.

An assistant attorney general in the state Attorney General's Office at the time, Commissioner Beck is a former member of the South Carolina House of Representatives (1996 – 2000). He received his Bachelor of Science Degree from Penn State University and his JD from the University of South Carolina School of Law in 1999, when he turned 41 years old.

Law school was even more demanding because it had been years since he was an undergraduate and he was no longer used to the rigors of academic life. At the same time, Commissioner Beck says he enjoyed some advantages from his years of experience on the police force in Pennsylvania and on the security team for the Savannah River Site in Aiken. He had an outstanding career as a police officer in Pennsylvania, where he was named law enforcement officer of the year and cited for his work with juvenile delinquents.

Commissioner Beck smiles when he considers that after years of presenting cases before the bench, he is now serving on the bench. “I am looking forward to my new role,” he says.

Like Commissioner Beck, Commissioner Wilkerson’s career has also turned full circle. Early in his career he was a claims examiner at the South Carolina Workers’ Compensation Commission, and later served as mayor of Cayce for 18 years. A graduate of Newberry College, Commissioner Wilkerson was vice president at Countybank Insurance and is a past president of the Municipal Association of South Carolina and the Lexington Municipal Association.

“As mayor, my biggest challenge was communications. The public does not see all the work that goes on behind the scenes and sometimes people think we just come in and vote on issues. When we don’t communicate effectively we have major problems,” he says.

He has been a quick study at the commission, thanks to his background in claims and the insurance industry. Although much of his new work is familiar, he is adjusting to the new dynamics of the position. On his way to hearing cases in Charleston the other day, Commissioner Wilkerson kept getting calls from the parties eager to explore every avenue right up to last minute.

“I had 10 or 12 cases when I started from Columbia. By the time I reached Summerville, all but one had dropped off,” he recalls.

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